

# Forest loss in the Ulugurus, Tanzania and the status of Uluguru Bush Shrike *Malaconotus alius*

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Les Monts Uluguru en Tanzanie orientale sont un site de grande importance ornithologique, possédant deux espèces d'oiseaux endémiques. L'une de celles-ci, le Gladiateur des Uluguru *Malaconotus alius*, est considérée comme un des oiseaux les plus rares d'Afrique. Des études récentes ont démontré que ses effectifs comprennent environ 1.200 couples, ce qui est plus du double des estimations précédentes. Cette population semble cependant limitée à la réserve forestière Uluguru Nord, qui contient moins de 100 km<sup>2</sup> de forêt, et où 16% de la forêt à des altitudes qui conviennent à l'espèce a été détruite depuis 1977 (une perte de plus de 20 km<sup>2</sup> de forêt). Malgré la bonne nouvelle que l'espèce survit en plus grand nombre qu'estimé auparavant, toute destruction supplémentaire de forêt du site entre 1.200 et 1.700 m d'altitude augmentera le risque de disparition de l'espèce.

**F**orest in the Uluguru Mountains of eastern Tanzania supports an exceptional biodiversity, including two endemic bird species and similarly high rates of endemism among other animals and plants. Following a Royal Society for the Protection of Birds–European Union project to plan conservation action in these mountains, the Danish Ornithological Society and Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanza-

nia have obtained funding from DANIDA for a three-year project, which aims to initiate conservation in the region in collaboration with other local organisations.

During 2000 the project has mapped the area of remaining forest and undertaken a survey of the endemic Uluguru Bush Shrike *Malaconotus alius* (see below). The rate of forest loss will have a major

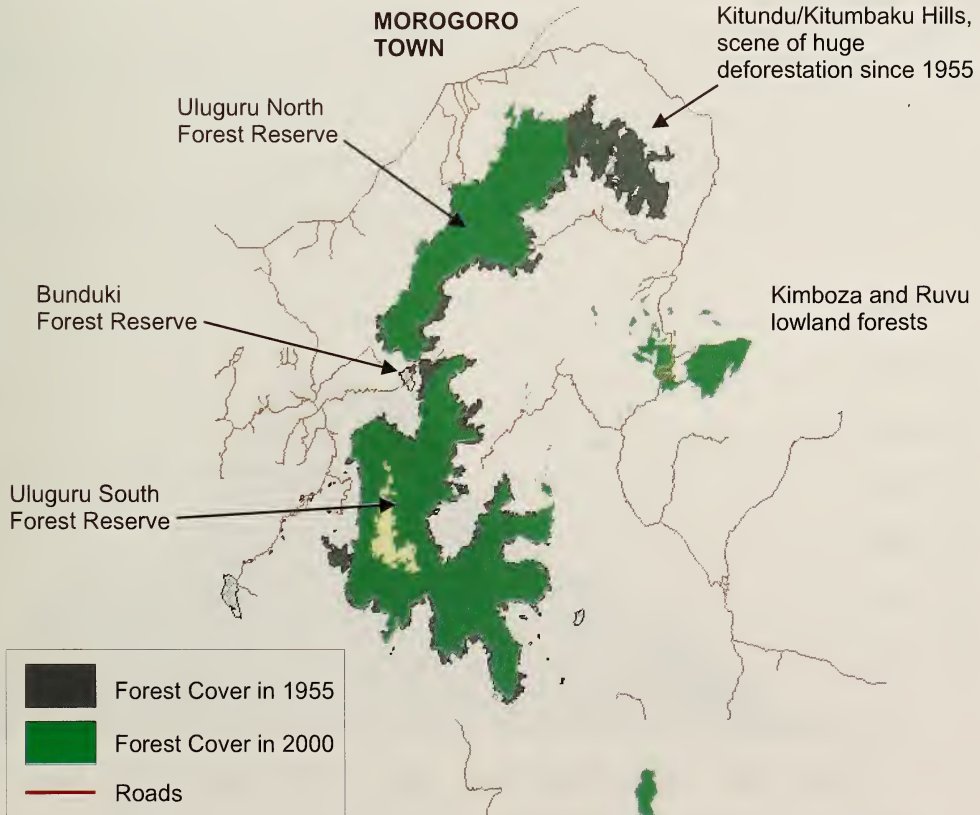


Figure 1. Loss of submontane and montane forest in the Uluguru Mountains between 1955 and 2000.

impact on the habitat available for the Uluguru Bush Shrike, and hence on its long-term chances for survival. Aerial photographs from 1955 and 1977 permitted the former extent of forest cover to be determined. Ground surveys undertaken in 2000 have assessed the remaining forest area on the mountains, allowing some conclusions to be made on the degree of forest loss over time.

### Forest loss

Between 1955 and 2000 forest cover on the Ulugurus declined from c300 km<sup>2</sup>, to c220 km<sup>2</sup>. Most loss occurred in submontane forests (at 500–1,500 m) outside the Catchment Forest Reserves of Uluguru North and Uluguru South. The forest loss included almost the entire area of non-reserved forest on the north-west margin of the Uluguru North Forest Reserve (Fig 1). This area of forest has been converted to farmland and remaining forest areas are underplanted with bananas as a cash crop. Within the Uluguru North and Uluguru South Catchment Forest Reserves the extent of forest cover remained constant over this period and even expanded slightly in some areas.

### Uluguru Bush Shrike

This species is the rarest of the Ulugurus endemic birds and one of the rarest in Africa. It now appears confined to Uluguru North Forest Reserve (83.6 km<sup>2</sup>), where it prefers forests at 1,200–1,700 m altitude in the submontane band. Regrettably, submontane forest was subject to the greatest destruction in 1955–1977 (Fig 2), a trend that has continued up to the present day.

Field work in the mid-1990s suggested that the population of Uluguru Bush Shrike was unlikely to exceed 1,000 individuals<sup>1</sup>. A detailed new survey was made over six weeks, in December 1999–January 2000, using randomly located points and tape playback methods. The survey provided a more precise population estimate of c1,200 pairs in Uluguru North Forest Reserve. No records were obtained from Uluguru South Forest Reserve (164.3 km<sup>2</sup>), where the species was heard on one occasion in 1981. It is therefore tentatively concluded that the species now occurs only in Uluguru North Forest Reserve.

While it is encouraging that detailed surveys have raised the estimated population to 1,200 pairs, the loss of its preferred habitat in Uluguru North is of serious concern and the entire area of forest available to the species is now well below 100 km<sup>2</sup>. The species is currently listed as Endangered<sup>1</sup>, based on its tiny range at only one site. However, we are not overly pessimistic and believe that its chances of survival are greater than this status indicates. There is still available habitat in the Uluguru North Forest Reserve in good condition and related species of *Malacotus* elsewhere in montane Africa appear able to survive in very small patches of forest. ¶

### Reference

1. BirdLife International 2000. *Threatened Birds of the World*. Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International & Barcelona: Lynx Edicions.

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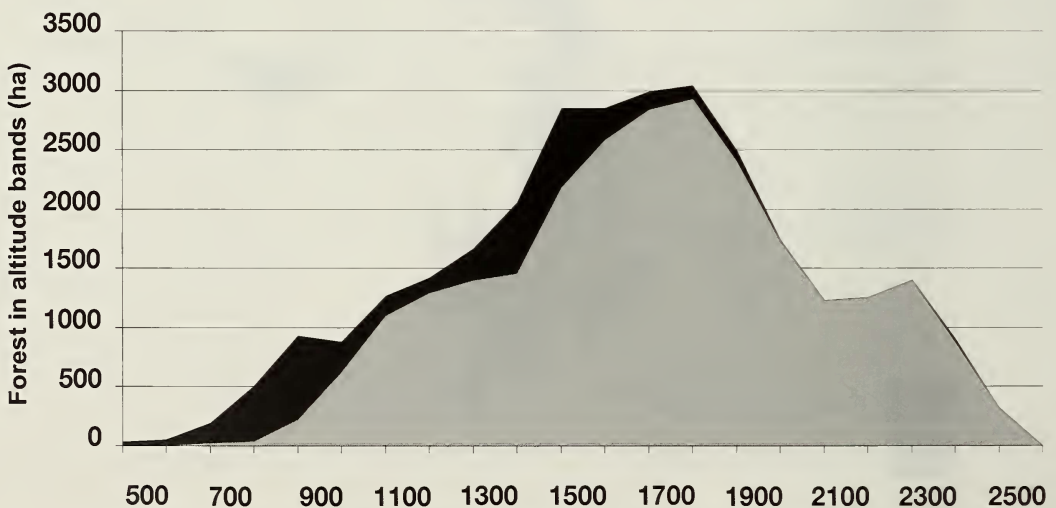


Figure 2. Altitudinal distribution of forest in the Ulugurus in 1955 (black and grey) and 1977 (grey only), excluding forests below 500 m. The trend of forest loss between 700 and 1,700 m altitude exhibited here has continued to the present day.